

# Bring on the experts



It's high time that program managers at the U.S. Army's expert simulation arm, PEO STRI, be consulted during the acquisition process for its trainers and simulators.

This sort of cooperation seems blindingly obvious to anyone outside the Army, but like two trucks driving parallel highways, Army managers with acquisition authority for helicopter, vehicle and other training devices often have no formal connection point with the Army's experts at the Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation.

This has too often led to unnecessarily long development times, duplicative efforts, trainers that are more expensive than they need be and which might not be ideal for the training task.

It's difficult not to be amazed that the clear solution — to bring in PEO STRI — was not spotted sooner.

Under a new policy proposal from the Army's senior acquisition office, PEO STRI must be consulted during the development phase of training requirements.

The initiative has been roundly welcomed.

Two questions remain: Is the Army nimble enough to rapidly convert policy to reality so that soldiers can more quickly train on upgraded simulators before they deploy? And will PEO STRI handle the increased workload or suffocate under the extra paperwork and responsibility?

Senior Army acquisition officers assure TSJ they are committed

to meeting their aggressive deadlines for change. And PEO STRI officials say they can absorb the extra duties.

Optimism is easily voiced in the early stages of any major initiative, and the Army is too often a giant and inflexible machine that does not bend easily to change. But here is a chance for the Army to address a major flaw in its acquisition process. This move is so overdue that one can only hope Army officials are singing the same optimistic tune in a year's time.

There's a long military history of grandiose plans getting tripped by the implementation. When that happens, the losers are inevitably soldiers who don't get the best available training. ■

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## Our Mahon in Europe

# Going solo gets lonely



Is the demand for training services outgrowing the ability of companies to "go it alone"?

IITEC celebrates its 18th birthday this year, and one significant change in that time is the way training requirements have grown. From modest beginnings, in which training systems were built to cater to single items of equipment, users now seek comprehensive systems.

Expansion of requirements has led to a new training landscape. Single companies, which have focused on technical excellence in specific training aspects, now tend to join consortia to address large-scale requirements. Such consortia typically comprise companies with "sector expertise" and at least one company with contracting and/or systems integration expertise.

Consider the NH90 helicopter training system initiative in Germany. NH Training Systems, a joint venture of CAE and Thales, is the prime contractor and design authority for the NH90 full-mission simulators. It then subcontracts work share to CAE GmbH, Thales, Rheinmetall Defence Electronics and Eurocopter. All four subcontractors will deliver hardware and software to NH Training Systems. Further complicating the scenario is that all four subcontractors are also shareholders in the private consortium HFTS, which has responsibility for delivering the training under Germany's first PFI arrangement.

This is not a bad thing. The synergies arising from a combination of companies that have specialized in specific disciplines are obvious. But the potential for inertia and added layers of decision-making

and bureaucracy threatens to lengthen the acquisition process.

Suppliers and users alike are aware of this — and people are doing something. For example, in successfully bidding on the U.K.'s Military Flying Training System, Lockheed Martin and VT Group developed criteria as a team to overcome a lack of trust that surfaces in some consortia. That included seeking complementary competencies, not competitive ones, and ensuring the consortium operated independently of the parent companies in a visible manner.

Their team was essentially partnering for a 30-year lifespan — not simply to win a contract. That bodes well for future contracts and may prove to be a hallmark for training service ventures. ■

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